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ABSTRACT

For one instructor, years of working with children in the art classroom suggested that talking with children is necessary and vital to understanding how they learn artistically and how to teach them. This paper focuses specifically on children's talk about their art in relation to the children's view that their world is separate and distinct from the adult world. The paper states that, in interviews with children, the children's view suggested that they interpret changes in their drawings through time in terms of their acquired concerns or characteristics they associate with adults. The paper looks at children's talk about their art from the children's perspectives rather than from the more common adult-centric perspective. It uses children's perspectives as both a theoretical framework and a methodological tool. Theoretically, suspending adult perceptions and judgments provides the framework for thinking about and analyzing the range of children's talk in the study; methodologically, children's perspectives are revealed through group interviews with sixth graders. The interactions among the children and the interaction between researcher and children resulted in conversations centering around a collection of each child's drawings. (Contains 48 references.) (BT)

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Introduction

Twenty-five years ago Maxine Greene (1974) referred to the inequities in education, calling for "a conversation drawing in voices kept inaudible over the generations, a dialogue involving more and more living persons" (p. 213). Although Greene, at the time, was referring specifically to adult minority groups such as women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities, she may, just as well, have been talking about children. Today, many educational researchers (Allen, 1995; Alvermann et al.,1996; Erickson and Shultz, 1992; LeCompte and Preissle, 1992; Stinson, 1993) stress that there is a need for studies that allow student voices to be heard.

Despite the fact that teachers work with children every day, they may have little opportunity in their busy schedules to enter into a conversation with children, to listen to their talk, to understand their perspectives. Writing in 1995, Greene said, "children are often conceived of as human resources rather than persons. They are frequently spoken of as if they were raw materials to be shaped to market demand, ... shaped (benevolently and efficiently) for uses others will define" (p. 32).

In research, as well as in the classroom, children's voices are often absent. According to Erickson and Schultz (1992), students' voices are conspicuously omitted from the research literature because interview studies that probe students' experiences are rare. In the last decade not much has changed. My years of working with children in the art classroom suggested to me that talking with children is necessary and vital to my understanding of how they learn artistically and how to better teach them. Regardless of what I think about their work, what the children say and think about their work are what is important for them. Looking at the artwork alone does not always tell me how or what my students are thinking.

This paper focuses specifically on children's talk about their art in relation to the children's view that their world is separate and distinct from the adult world. In interviews with children, the children's talk suggested that they interpret changes in their drawings through time in terms of their acquiring concerns or characteristics they associate with adults. I look at children's talk about their art from the children's perspectives rather than from the more common adult-centric perspective. Children's perspectives is used as both a theoretical framework and a methodological tool. Theoretically, suspending adult perceptions and judgments provides the framework for thinking about and analyzing the range of children's talk in this study. Methodologically, children's perspectives are revealed through group interviews with sixth graders. The interactions among the children and the interactions between researcher and children result in conversations centering around a collection of each child's drawings.

A search of the literature on children talking about their art revealed little. Very few studies involve direct conversation with children about their art; those that do, deal with specific inquiries about assessing the artistic knowledge children have or about assessing the ability of children to engage in aesthetic thinking. This literature often centers on the child's limitations and is conceived and written from an adult point of view. While there is

little research in the art education field that focuses on children talking about their own artwork, there are some relevant studies that look at the talk of children while engaged in artistic thinking and creating. A few of these studies use children's perspectives as a lens.

Children's Perspectives

As critics have pointed out, many studies about children are framed by adult perspectives on socialization and education (Davies, 1982; Goode, 1986; Hubbard, 1991; James & Prout, 1990; Knupfer, 1996; Solberg, 1990; Waksler, 1986, 1991). Particularly with respect to educational research, the first-person voice of the student is "conspicuously absent" (Erickson & Shultz, 1992, p. 480). A range of concerns regarding the often unquestioned adult perspective has been articulated. Goode (1986) found in his studies of institutionalized children that adult theories and studies of children's behavior are a form of ethnocentrism, representing judgments made by a dominant group (the adults) about those in a subordinate group (the children). If adult assumptions are suspended, allowing children's "voices" to emerge, positive changes in the quality of life for children and in the kinds of experiences provided by schools may result.

Richard Bauman (1982), a noted folklorist, revealed a perspective similar to Goode's. Bauman analyzed children's folklore not through an adult lens, but as an ethnographer would undertake investigations of other cultural groups. In his view, judging children's folklore according to adult standards is a form of ethnocentrism, promoting a view that children are incomplete or "unfinished bearers of adult culture" (p. 173). He points out that this view tends to be attractive to educators because education is conceived as preparing children for adulthood. Although children do become adults, Bauman contends that research on children's folklore from an adult perspective is skewed by the underlying assumption that it should contribute toward correct adult ways of behaving. Rather, Bauman advocates for analyzing children's lore "in its own terms" (p. 174), from the perspective of the peer group. Using this perspective, Bauman discovered that the organization of children's counting-out rhymes is far more complex than previously suspect. Analysis revealed that these rhymes are not simple games of chance as had been previously suggested. Rather, they are used in complex ways to manipulate the desired outcomes of the game. In other words, this analysis revealed a more complex range of competencies utilized by children that the earlier adultcentric view revealed.

When adult beliefs about children are suspended, Waksler (1986) discovered that adults and children have separate versions of childhood. A limited sociological understanding of childhood results when children's points of view are not considered. The absence of children's explanations is seldom noticed, Waksler explains, because the very existence of children's perspectives is not recognized. Adult perspectives of socialization have been privileged over those of children because of an inability of adults to conceive of children as having equally valid, if alternate, world views. According to Waksler, adults take for granted that children know less than adults, have less experience, are less serious, and less important than adults. She recommends substituting the word "less" with the word "different," thus

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eliminating a judgmental evaluation.

Davies (1982) shares this view, saying that children interpret the world differently from adults, not because they have not yet learned to see the world the "right" way, but because they are seeing it in their own terms. In her study of fifth grade Australian children's social worlds, she describes the children's theories about friendship as difficult to understand because adult assumptions "about what friendship is or should be cloud our vision. We apply the wrong mental set or template and do not understand what we see" (p. 70). Greene (1995) concurs by stressing the importance of affirming the validity of many kinds of experience, even those that seem incompatible with our own interpretations of the world (p. 54).

Social scientists have started gathering accounts from children concerning their particular perspectives and strategies in relation to their social world. Educational researchers are increasingly calling for studies that allow student voices to be heard. Alvermann and her colleagues (Alvermann et al., 1996) argue that it appears that researchers have studied students' perceptions of classroom practices and schooling in general, but actually "there is little evidence that they [researchers] have placed students' experiences at the center of their research" (p. 247). Allen (1995) notes that "children must be encouraged to voice their concerns, opinions, and plans as learners" (p. 286). Stevenson (1990) says, "Unfortunately, the research literature rarely addresses students' perspectives as a means of illuminating our understanding of curriculum practice" (p.329). LeCompte and Preissle (1992) point to the small percentage of studies in education that "specifically address what children do, feel, or think about in school" (p.819). And, according to Erickson and Shultz (1992),

> no research has been done that places student experience at the center of attention.... If the student is visible at all in a research study he is usually viewed from the perspective of adult educators' interests and ways of seeing, that is, as failing, succeeding, motivated, mastering, unmotivated, responding, or having a misconception. Rarely is the perspective of the student herself explored (p. 467).

Art Education Research

Over a decade ago, Jones and McFee (1986) noted that contemporary art education investigation was marked by diversity of intent, as well as by research method. They pointed out that most research in art education has focused on the selection of educational goals, on teaching methods and strategies of art educators, and on the impact of social institutions on the learner. During the last decade, art education literature has remained focused primarily on these issues and on curriculum issues and standards. Published work reflects little interest in children's talk about art making or learning.

Most of the research concerning children talking about art investigates the aesthetic responses of children. The focus is often on the teacher, on the curriculum, or on children's stages or responses as compared to those of adults, rather than on children and on listening to children's perspectives. Because of the different foci of that research, different

interpretations of children's abilities to display aesthetic response competence are revealed (Taunton, 1982). Some research implies that children are not ready for aesthetic education, while other studies suggest that children can benefit by engaging in aesthetic talk. Taunton believes that research on aesthetic development that does not consider the child's background or that uses an adult standard for comparison is "ill-conceived" (p. 104). She calls for a redirection of research that does not presuppose stages of aesthetic development, that takes place in a natural setting, and that is contextualized in a sociological framework.

Since Taunton's review 18 years ago, few studies of this nature have been done in art education. Although various qualitative studies have been done, this research seldom allows the children's voices to be heard or the children's perspectives to be revealed.

In the only published art education study that uses children's perspectives both theoretically and methodologically, Klein (1997) interviewed 33 second, fifth, and sixth graders within the context of their regular art class period to explore children's responses to humor in art. The children looked at 136 images of humor, including pun, parody, paradox, and satire. Klein conversed with the children in small peer discussion groups over a 16 week period and found that children across all grade levels shared amusement in visual humor in popular culture images and shared a lack of amusement in visual humor in fine art. The children's responses revealed that they shared beliefs and assumptions about art and, as a result of their engagement with visual humor and with their participation in the study, they experienced an expanded view of what art could be.

Other studies in which children's perspectives are both a theoretical framework and a methodological approach are found in the work of Nichols (1996) and of Champlin (1991). Nichols examined young children's talk while they were engaged in the artistic process. He interacted with four children ranging from two to four years of age, while they were painting or drawing in their own homes. In his study, Nichols describes the stories the children tell him about their art work, and the emotional impact the stories have on the children as well as on himself. Nichols shows the children eager to communicate their ideas and feelings about their artwork, about their fears, fantasies and relationships.

Champlin (1991) analyzed the talk of six- to eight-year old children in the educational setting of the art class. Her purpose was to understand and explain the child's potential for engagement in thinking about art and in creating art and, more specifically, to explore the possibility that young children may possess unrecognized aesthetic sensibilities. She adopted Mandell's (1988) "least-adult" role of participant observer in which the researcher suspends judgments, engages in joint action with the children, and minimizes social distance and status differentials by disregarding adult superiority. From her data, "artistic resolve," or the "desire and strong inclination toward engagement in artistic search processes (p. 12)," emerged as a theoretical construct. Artistic resolve was conceived as a continuum that ranged from artistically resolved, to artistically ambivalent, to artistically unresolved. The child's "orientation," either process or conceptual, combined with artistic resolve to reveal the aesthetic sense of the young child (p. 143-144). For example, one child may be

artistically resolved with a process orientation and another may be artistically resolved with a conceptual orientation. According to her research, the highly artistic child can experience all facets of the artistic search process and has the potential motivation and drive of the mature artist.

Studies of Children's Perspectives in Other Educational Disciplines

While there are few studies in art education that allow children's voices to be the primary concern, there are several studies in other educational disciplines in which children's perspectives are addressed both theoretically and methodologically. Erickson and Shultz (1992) note that the most promising arena for research examining student perspectives is in the curricular area of literacy in general and of writing in particular (see Dyson, 1984; Nespor, 1987; Sperling & Freedman, 1987). These studies of writing do not compare the students' understandings to preconceived ideas of adults which often result in mislabeling. The students' understandings are shown descriptively as they occur in written assignments the students are asked to complete and to which teachers respond. The researchers monitor naturally occurring student writing through analytic narrative description which gives some insight into specific ways in which students engage curriculum (Erickson & Shultz, 1992).

Four studies from other educational disciplines are noteworthy because the methodological approach used allowed children to be seen on their own terms, with no comparison to adult ways of thinking and doing. In these studies, the children's voices are prominent; their words are used to describe their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

Alvermann and her colleagues (Alvermann et al.,1996) used group interviews with adolescents as a means of exploring middle school students' perspectives on text-based discussions in their language arts classes. At five culturally diverse sites across the United States, the researchers videotaped classroom discussions and then met with selected students in focus group interviews. Alvermann and her colleagues found that students were aware of the conditions they believed to be conducive to good discussions, they were knowledgeable about the different tasks and topics that influenced their participation, and they understood how classroom discussions helped them comprehend what they read. The researchers noted that students had different viewpoints from teachers concerning their own role in discussions and concerning the role of others. They stressed that the students' own agendas may be different from the teacher's intentions but, nevertheless, the students' agendas may be more productive in terms of what is learned (p. 264). The researchers emphasized the importance of listening to students' voices. They pointed out that the words the students used suggested much about their social lives and histories both in and out of school, about their insights into classroom talk about texts, and about their understanding of their own roles as participants in classroom discussions.

Allen (1995) interviewed students and staff at five Georgia elementary schools to discover students' attitudes toward their schools and toward their teachers regarding decision-making both in the classroom and in the school. She conducted focus group

interviews with approximately 10 students from grades K-5. Allen identified themes that occurred most frequently and with the most emphasis. The students' voices clearly explained the importance of peer relationships, the need for teachers to have fair rules and consequences and to make learning fun, and the importance of student input regarding both classroom decisions and school decisions.

In a slightly different study, Stinson (1993) interviewed high school students enrolled in a dance class. Her study focused on how students in one high school subject made sense of their experiences. Stinson found that the children's talk went beyond consideration for what was important in the dance studio to what was important for teaching and learning in general. The students asked for four things: To be stimulated and to learn, to make meaning from what they are taught, to be treated with understanding and care, and to be accepted by others and to freely express themselves (p. 235).

Stinson also emphasized the importance of listening to students. What students asked for was not unreasonable but might necessitate a change in the way students, educators, and others think about the purpose of school and its value on the lives of individuals and communities.

Finally, Davies (1982) studied 10-and 11-year old Australian children's social worlds. She met with 23 children in their school in small groups of from three to five students. She engaged in unstructured conversations with them that covered a wide range of topics, such as friends, family, and teachers. Her conversations with the children were not solely about the children talking about their experiences, however. Since the children interviewed in groups with Davies, "they brought their social world with them and that social world became an observable part of the talk" (p. 2). The children talked to her about their interactions and, at the same time, they interacted with Davies and with each other.

Davies (1982) emphasized the differences in the knowledge that children bring to adult-child interactions, in the knowledge children bring to their shared culture, and in the knowledge that adults bring to adult-child interactions. Adults may assume that there is a reciprocity of perspectives but it is a false assumption. The tasks children face in the classroom are also different from the tasks of adults. When tasks differ, perceptions, understandings, and strategies also differ (p. 3).

Davies (1982) concluded that children are more perceptive and more complex than adults give them credit for. Their models of the world, which are fluid and creative, make sense to them because they use *their* templates, and researchers will only understand this world if they also use the children's templates.

Clearly, there is research being done in schools that allows the voices of children to be heard. In art education, however, it is often the researcher's voice that is heard and the researcher's agenda that is addressed. Studies are needed in art education that focus on the children's thoughts and ideas about their art. Almost twenty years ago, Freeman (1980) examined adult theories of children's pictorial representation, but pointed out that "no one has yet given an account of the development of the child's own theory" (p. 355). He goes

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on to say, "It is reasonably clear why children draw, but we do not yet know what they think of the whole business" (p. 356).

Methodology

To gain access to children's multiple perspectives on their own art work, I interviewed a group of six sixth graders weekly, for ten weeks. The talk of the children, in relation to a collection of each child's drawings, constituted the primary data for the study. The setting for this study is a small, urban, non-public school where I teach art to elementary students in grades K-6. The population of the school is approximately 300 students who live either in the city in which the school is located, or in neighboring towns. In the year in which my data were generated, the minority enrollment was 21%. All students pay tuition except for 13% chosen by lottery from a pool of low income city residents.

For four years in grades one through four, I served as the art teacher of all six participants. During the fifth year the students were taught by a certified substitute art teacher while I was on study leave, and in their sixth year, a different substitute teacher worked with them. I purposely did not teach the selected students during their sixth year to avoid a conflict of interest. I also thought that the students would respond more readily to me if I did not adopt the duel role of art teacher-researcher with them.

Participants for the study were selected based on the total number of drawings that illustrated five different topics in sketch journals. The sketch journals or sketch books were spiral bound drawing pads in which the children had been drawing since first grade. These sketch books remained in the art room from year to year and the children drew approximately five drawings in them each year. From the drawings in the sketch pads, I determined five discrete categories: Self-portraits, drawings containing houses or other kinds of architecture, drawings of interior scenes, drawings of outdoor scenes, and drawings that primarily contained other people. Totals from the first five categories were tabulated for all 26 sixth graders who had been at the school since first grade. Students were ranked according to the highest number of drawings from the five categories and six students with the most drawings were selected.

Unstructured Interviews

The children and I met in unstructured group interviews. According to Lofland (1971), the unstructured interview is a "flexible strategy of discovery" (p. 76) where the object is "to carry on a guided conversation and to elicit rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" (p. 76). Denzin (1970) believes that unstructured, open-ended interviews allow the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for participants since no fixed sequence of questions is suitable to all respondents. The children set the initial agenda during our conversations as they looked at and discussed their artwork. My questions and their responses to them generated new questions.

Tammivaara and Enright (1986) indicate that more successful children's interviews occur when researchers allow the children to begin talking and to direct the conversation themselves. Allowing the children to direct the discussion creates an encounter that is less

adult controlling and less likely to be associated by the children with a classroom environment.

Rather than interview the children separately, I interviewed the group of six children together. A group interview has the advantages of being "data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365). The children appeared to be comfortable with each other and joked considerably during our meetings.

Data Analysis

Data generation, coding, and analysis were done simultaneously throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof, 1995). The children's own artwork and interviews with the young artists were used in this study to identify and interpret themes and concepts that the children used to talk about their artwork and about art in general. As I transcribed interviews, I reflected on my data which helped shape subsequent conversations with the children.

Focus during the initial data analysis was on the children's solicited and unsolicited responses. A solicited response to a question could be different from an unsolicited response and I constantly searched for verification for solicited answers in the often more subtle, unsolicited answers.

I also looked at the data in terms of its substantive and interactional content. Davies (1982) makes the distinction between analyzing data in "substantive" terms and analyzing data in "interactional" terms (pp. 33-36). Substantive data are found in "what" the children are saying, or in the words they are using to describe an idea or explain a procedure. These could be solicited or unsolicited. Interactional data are "how" the children are responding to me, the researcher, as well as how they are responding to each other.

I allowed the data to identify words that I used to initially organize and code the data. Tesch (1990) indicates that concepts are identified or constructed from material such as theoretical frameworks, research questions, or the data themselves.

Several of my categories overlapped and many segments of data had more than one label assigned to it. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) indicate that subcategories will often overlap each other and that codes can be nested or embedded within one another and intersect. Codes reflected both substantive and interactional data. My process of coding identified themes, patterns, events, and actions and allowed a preliminary organization of the data so that a more detailed analysis could be undertaken.

As categories and concepts formed, I looked for relationships between them. These relationships suggested new categories as patterns began to emerge and some categories subsumed a number of others. These kinds of relationships can form one basis for the development of interpretations (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I also re-examined the data for negative instances of each pattern. Then, these negative instances defined category boundaries or formed new categories. My analysis looked closely in terms of the

substantive and interactional meanings of the contradiction as well as whether the response was solicited or unsolicited.

As data analysis continued, "narrative vignettes" were included in the process (Alvermann et al., 1996, p. 253). These are short writings that contain excerpts from the data along with my interpretive commentary. I wrote the vignettes in an effort to generate, explain, and support various assertions about the data.

Validity

The validity of my interpretations of the children's responses was often checked by what Cicourel (1974) calls "indefinite triangulation" (p. 97). In this procedure, the researcher creates opportunities for the participants to react to information obtained on a prior occasion. I frequently asked the children the same questions I had previously asked them in other sessions in order to verify my interpretation of a response. On occasion I read from the transcript or asked a student to read from it. If my interpretations varied, or if the children gave different responses, I refined or expanded my original conclusions.

I also solicited confirming answers from the students by embedding a question in a scenario or a story. For example when talking about artistic talent, I told them of an incident that occurred in a college class that I was teaching. Their reactions to the story gave me additional information from which either to confirm or to deny the original interpretation.

There is the possibility that students responded in a manner that they considered expected of them, rather than in a way that described what they really believed. My previous relationship with the students was as their teacher. In my teacher role, students were encouraged to discuss their opinions freely with little concern for finding a "right answer." The children were familiar with seeing many different solutions that resulted from the individual perspectives, abilities, and experiences that their classmates brought and utilized to solve creative problems. They usually did not work in a way that would indicate that they were trying to meet specific teacher expectations.

The close attention to solicited and unsolicited responses, as well as the substantive and interactional meanings attached to the responses, often verified my interpretations. Looking for negative instances of patterns also provided verification. While there is no single "correct" interpretation (Wolcott, 1990) of an idea, the data provided by the students and by my subsequent analysis were used systematically to support my interpretations.

Limitations

Although the sample for the study is small, the richness of data that may result replaces the otherwise less in-depth responses that may be obtained from a larger sample. The length of time interviewing the children was affected by the end of school approaching and the increasing difficulty of finding an agreeable time to meet with the children. Unplanned activities at the school infringed on previously scheduled interview sessions.

Interpretations derived from this study are intended to be from the children's perspectives at a specific age and specific point in time. As the children age and enter new schools and acquire new information about themselves and about their environments, their

perspectives, undoubtedly, will change. Results from this study describe the perspectives of six individual students in the context of a specific setting at a specific point in the children's development.

Results and Discussion

The initial focus of this study was to investigate children's perspectives on their artistic learning. While the children talked at length about their art and about their art learning, they discussed other topics, as well. What the children said and how they interacted with each other and with me gave evidence of a perspective the children had on the world and on people, ideas, and events within that world. Their way of looking at the world was reflected in their perspectives on their art, on their learning, on their schooling, on their relationships with adults and peers. To address the children's perspective on their art and on their art learning, it is first necessary to address the children's perspective on their world.

The Children's World

The children's language and their interactions during our conversations seemed to reveal distinct perspectives on the world in which they lived and the rules, behaviors, and actions within that world. From the children's perspective, there is a "kids' world" and in that world kids stick together and understand each other. In one of our conversations Lynette referred explicitly to the "kids' world," which implied a comparison between "their" way of thinking and "my" way of thinking:

C.M.: I think math is easier.
Alan: No, no, no.
Lynette: No, see? Look.
C.M.: Math is easier to me because there is a right and wrong answer.
Lynette: But look!
C.M.: And you know when you've got it and then you, but for art, you never know, like when to stop or, you know.
Lynette: Get up an example for her so she can know what I'm talking about.
C.M.: Know what, we have to stop. *(our meeting time is over)*
Lynette: Well, wait, let me just say this as an example. Okay, you have to draw that fox *(a stuffed fox)*. Every hair, every little strand, right? Now with this, this is what we gotta do, this is the kind of math we gotta do. *(shows me an algebra problem that Debbie has written down for her.)*
C.M.: Can you use a calculator?
Lynette: No. That's what we have to do. That's, like, what we're usually working on. You would rather do that, you know, like, if you were in the sixth grade and you were really a good drawer, you would rather do that than that?
C.M.: No, I'd rather do that. *(draw)*
Lynette: So, then?
C.M.: But that would be easier. *(math)*
Lynette: But you're coming from, but I'm saying from OUR world, from us little kids' world.

The children tried to explain to me what kind of math they were required to do in their classroom and that they found it difficult and boring. I indicated to them that math was usually easy for me but that I preferred to draw. They could not understand my reasoning

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on this and they tried hard to explain their perspective at the same time that I tried to explain mine. At this point we were negotiating an understanding of each other's perspectives. Lynette introduced the terminology "kids' world," an unsolicited designation that she brought up herself. First, Lynette said, "if you were in the sixth grade," trying to get me to imagine I was the same age they were and would thus understand what they were saying. When that did not work, she said more strongly that I should put myself in "OUR world, from us little kids' world." To the children there was a distinction between how I thought as a member of the "adult world," and how they thought as members of the "kids' world." Lynette implied that if I could put myself in their world, then I would understand how they thought.

The children talked about the distinction between the child's world and the adult's world as if it were a shared understanding among children. When Lynette made a reference to the "kids' world," the other children understood her meaning without receiving a clarification from her. In another conversation Ellyn said, "Sometimes the gulf is bigger than others," implying that she believed there were two distinct worlds and that there was actually a distance between the worlds of "kids" and grown-ups," but the distance varied. Ellyn's remarks seemed to suggest that when children were young and "immature" the gulf may be larger. As they got older and more "mature" the gulf narrowed. The children have a membership in their own world where they are secure. They know that other children will understand them and they can communicate easily with their peers.

Children bring both a different perspective and different knowledge to adult-child interactions than adults bring. Children seem to know that their perspective and knowledge are different from that of adults. Adults, however, may assume that there is a reciprocity of perspectives, but it is a false assumption. The tasks children face in the classroom are also different from the tasks of adults. When tasks differ, perceptions, understandings, and strategies also differ (Davies, 1982, p. 3). The emphasis here is placed on "different" so that it is not a value-laden description of how children understand or perceive tasks and other events in the classroom. Although they often do not do so, adults can accept this difference as being an alternative view of things so that a judgmental evaluation is removed.

The children talked frequently about their teachers and about how most teachers don't understand kids:

C.M.: So how come some teachers understand kids more than others?
Ellyn: Some people, like, Ms. Hall and other people who understand kids, like Ms. Perry, they understand, maybe they, like Alan was saying, all the grown-ups are really serious, well, not all of them are and maybe they're just, like, an exception because it's hard to understand kids. It's like,
Lynette: You're not a kid. ***(whispering to Ellyn)***
Ellyn: You're NOT a kid. Yeah! Exactly!
C.M.: But they were once.
Ellyn: They were, but, I guess it's hard to remember.
C.M.: What happens between being a kid and being an adult?
Alan: You're an adolescent.

C.M.: *I know but, like, what, is there a change in the way you think and all that stuff? Cuz you, even you guys are making a distinction between kids and adults.*
Lynette: Well, kids understand kids, well.
Samantha: We understand both.
Lynette: Yeah, we understand both.
C.M.: Okay, you understand kids right now, right?
Lynette: Yeah.
Samantha: Yeah.
Ellyn: But we don't understand adults.
Matt: Not all of them.

Teachers did not understand kids because they were not kids themselves. Lynette whispered the words, "You're not a kid" to Ellyn, who repeated them. Ellyn's face lit up and she said, "Yeah! Exactly!" in a surprised voice, as if, all of a sudden, she had discovered the answer as to why teachers did not understand kids. It did not matter that teachers were once kids because they obviously did not remember what it was like.

The differences between the adult world and the child world repeatedly came up in our conversations. Debbie talked about "getting older"and gave a colorful response:

CM: Wait a minute. Debbie said she likes her older ones better because, the younger ones *(meaning "early" drawings from 1st and 2nd grade)*, because she didn't really care what they looked like. Does that mean you care more now about what they look like?
Debbie: Mmm-hmm. *(meaning yes)*
CM: Why?
Debbie: Because I'm older. The older, you have to be serious about it, I don't know why.
CM: You do?
Debbie: Yup. I'd like to get drunk somewhere.
CM: Debbie!! Do you guys feel that way too, that when you're older, you
Debbie: Have more responsibilities.

Debbie associated her more recent drawings with being serious about her art work and with caring more about how her drawings looked in sixth grade than when she was younger. She associated being serious with being older and said that she would like to "get drunk" because this was an adult behavior, out of her reach in her status as a child. But if she were more serious about her work then maybe she would be getting closer to being an adult so, therefore, she could possibly get drunk. Then Debbie qualified her seriousness a little by saying that adults had more responsibilities, so perhaps that was why they were serious. That she liked her early drawings better could mean that, at that time, there was less pressure to be serious about her work. If her work didn't look mature, it was acceptable, nonetheless. Now that she was older, she apparently assumed that her drawings should look more serious and more mature and less childlike.

The children appeared to be fairly conscious of the distinction between the kids' world and the adult world. They seemed to effortlessly talk about the distinction as if this were

not the first time they had thought about it. They understood each other as they filled in the gaps or extended the ideas of their classmates.

Although the children believed in a children's world that is distinct from an adults' world, they did not talk about characteristics of their world. Their world seemed to be an unspoken understanding among children and there was, perhaps, no need to talk about it among themselves. Their world was a "given" and needed no further explanation. The children know what it is like to be a child just as adults know what it is like to be adults. Adults do not talk about their adult world either although they do talk about children and they often compare children to adults. Similarly, the children talked about the adult world.

Two characteristics of the adult world that the children often talked about were that adults are both responsible and serious:

C.M.: Okay, here, Debbie, you say you care more about how your drawings look now and I asked you, "Why?" and you said, "Because I'm older. The older you are, you have to be serious about it."
Debbie: Yeah, you can't act like a kid.
C.M.: Why? What do you mean? How does being serious about it look?
Debbie: Means, like, if the teacher told me to draw a person and I drew an animal cuz I didn't feel like drawing a person, you have to pay attention to what she said and not act like a kid. Like, when I was little if somebody asked me to draw a person and I said I wanted to draw an animal or whatever, she would, the teacher would know that you wasn't that into it, so she wouldn't act seriously about it.
C.M.: Okay, but why do you have to act serious because you're older?
Debbie: Cuz you can't act like a kid anymore.
C.M.: Why not?
Debbie: Cuz you're grown up, you're growing up.

The children did not question the fact that they would grow up some day and become serious and responsible like adults, nor did they complain about it. When they reached that adult world, however, they "can't act like a kid anymore." Right now they seemed to accept it and to do what was necessary to co-exist with adults.

The children indicated that adults expected them to become more serious at a certain point in their lives and they appeared to accept that. The adults' task is also to socialize the children, to "straighten them out" so they will have a "good life," and the children expected adults to act this way. Samantha indicated this when she said, "I think when you get older you're expected to act more serious and more mature."

At the same time, there was the expectation for children that they act more adultlike for younger children, showing them the way to act and passing down the expectations of both children and adults. When Samantha said, "People expect you to set an example for, like, the younger kids and stuff," she showed her knowledge of adult expectations. Adults, by expecting older children to set examples for younger children, are "setting the stage" for socializing children into adult roles. According to the children, adults perceive their task, in socializing children, as helping them to see the world correctly, that is, to see the world the

way adults do and to teach children to become adults.

The children wanted adults to understand them but they believed also that there should be a distance between the two worlds. At the same time that children saw themselves as belonging in their world and knew that some day they would be part of the adult world, they wanted adults to maintain a distance. Debbie showed this when she said, "Cuz if you want your mother to dress exactly like you and act like you, you'd get mad at her."

Adults, also, do not want children to enter their world completely. The children expressed willingness to learn adult rules and adult ways of thinking about their world. Our conversational negotiations showed that the children wanted me to understand what they were thinking but they also wanted to understand what I was thinking.

Adults provide structures on which children are dependent and they do not want children to share this adult world or to be adults. Children, however, do want adults to be sensitive to the fact that their membership in the kids' world is serious and has rules and behaviors not operable in adult culture (Davies, 1982, p. 172). As Davies points out, children construct their own reality with each other, and they make sense of and develop strategies to cope with the adult world as and when it impinges on their world (p. 32). Therefore, children are caught in a world where they must balance their own world and the world of adults.

The children in my study seemed able to maintain a balance between both worlds. They did so partly by giving themselves a choice of when they would cross boundaries between the child's world and the adult's world. If they chose to act like an adult and enter the adult world, they would receive privileges. If they chose not to, they would not receive privileges:

C.M.: Do you like that expectation of having to be serious and grown up?
Samantha: Sometimes you get privileges.
C.M.: Like, what kind of privileges?
Samantha: Like
Debbie: You get to go outside when you finish your work. And sometimes if you just feel like acting, sometimes if you feel like acting like a kid and you wanna act like a kid you don't get privileges.

Debbie said that "if you *feel* like acting like a kid and you *wanna* act like a kid," then you should expect no privileges. But, it is her choice to act like a kid. By giving themselves choices, children may maintain some sense of control in an otherwise adult-controlled school environment. The choices that the children might give themselves may be more important than the privileges they may or may not have received.

Allen (1995), in her study of students' attitudes toward their schools and toward their teachers regarding decision-making, also found that the freedom to choose was an important issue for children. The children in her study discussed the importance of allowing students both individual choices as well as classroom choices.

Adults control most things for children. School attendance is compulsory, certain basic rules of social interaction need to be followed, words have specific meanings, and teachers

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tell you things and then test you on them (Davies, 1982, p. 28). Children have few choices and little power. By choosing to act like a child or by choosing to act seriously as an adult would, the children in my study held the power to control how often they would enact "mature" forms of behavior that they associated with the adult world.

In another conversation, Debbie brought up the idea of choice again:

C.M.: When you get to be an adult, are you going to understand kids?
Lynette: No.
Debbie: It depends if you want to [grow up or not.
Samantha: Yeah, I will.]
C.M.: You will? Why?
Ellyn: Well, you want to but you can't really determine your future.

To Debbie, a child got to decide when she would grow up because it "depends if you want to." It was a choice. If children decided to grow up, to become adults, then perhaps they would not understand kids, just like most other adults. Or, if the child decided not to grow up then she would always understand kids. At this point in Debbie's life, she was allowing herself that option. And, once again, Ellyn replied that you really couldn't tell what you would be like when you get older. They seemed to accept the idea that they would one day be older, that they would be more serious, more responsible, and have privileges. But right now, it was not their concern because "you can't really determine your future."

The Children's Talk about Art

That the children viewed their world as distinct and separate from the adult world impacts on their perspectives on their art. Children know they will be adults some day but right now their membership is in the child's world. Just as the children will eventually be adults, they see their art as being part of the progression from the child world to the adult world.

The children's talk revealed that they believed their drawings changed over the years because the children were "getting older." They and others expected their drawings to change. The children claimed that they cared more in sixth grade about their drawings than they did when they were younger. They said that their younger drawings were not as serious; they were more playful or funny and that not as much care and effort went into them. In sixth grade the children paid more attention to their drawings, they cared about how they looked, they were embarrassed if their drawings were not "good" or "mature." They held themselves to a certain standard. They wanted their artwork to look "mature" because to them that meant they, as children, were also becoming more mature. At the same time, they were distancing themselves from younger children and from younger children's ways of drawing.

They believed that a good drawing was one that represented the phenomenal world in a recognizable way and they measured their drawings against that criterion. If their drawings didn't measure up the children were embarrassed because that was interpreted to mean they were still like "little children."

Alan: Now if you, like, draw it bad, then it kind of embarrasses you more.
Lynette: Yeah, that's true.
Matt: Cuz you're older.
Alan: And back then you wouldn't care, you'd just think it was funny. And then now, if you, like, drew it bad you wouldn't like it and it would embarrass you.

There was a certain amount of embarrassment that Alan felt when his drawings looked "bad" or, according to Debbie, "immature:"

C.M.: Do you think that when you drew in the first grade that you approached your drawing the same way that you approach it now?
Ellyn: No. *(several voices say "no" simultaneously)*
C.M.: What's the difference?
Debbie: It was immature back then.

Debbie referred to "it" as immature, meaning either her drawings were immature or her approach to drawing was immature, or, perhaps, she was immature. Later in that same conversation, Alan said that his more recent drawings looked better, "Because, like, now we're more mature."

Many children lose interest in drawing in early adolescence (Davis, 1997). That the children were embarrassed if their drawings were not adultlike may indicate that that is one reason for the apparent loss of interest. The children wanted their drawings to be less playful and more serious. If their drawings were not, then the children were embarrassed. Perhaps this embarrassment explains the retreat from art: If children stop drawing altogether they will not have to cope with feelings of embarrassment.

The children made several references to the belief that their drawings would predictably improve as they got older. Improving to the children meant that their drawings would come closer to a realistic representation of the phenomenal world. It was expected that they would spend more time on their drawings and that they would be more serious about them. They were responsible for their work looking better and, just as adults have responsibilities and are more serious, their drawings, presumably, "should" follow that same path.

The children seemed to have an increasing concern for what others, particularly peers, think of their work:

C.M.: Do you think that happens at a certain age or in a certain grade?
Samantha: No. I think it's just as you start to get older you become more aware of how your drawings look and you might be more concerned about what people think, just as you get older, it might just develop.
C.M.: Why do you suppose you're so concerned about what others think? *(Pause)* Why does that happen?
Debbie: I have no idea.
Samantha: Um, because you want yours to look good and you want people to like it so, so you don't want people to think it's bad so you try really hard. You want everyone to like it.

Samantha indicated a sense of outside pressure, either from peers or from others when

she said, "you want people to like it" and "you don't want people to think it's bad." There seemed to be an expectation that their drawings would look "better" because they were getting older.

Along with getting older, children seemed to pay more attention to what was happening around them. They were more conscious of what their peers were doing. As a result, kids looked at each other's work and apparently judged it to some extent:

C.M.: Ummm, Debbie said that when she, she likes her earlier ones better because she didn't worry so much about, what did you say?
Debbie: What they looked like?
C.M.: What they looked like? And now she worries more about how they look like. Is that true for most of you?
Matt: Yeah.
Ellyn: Yes.
C.M.: Why?
Alan: I want it to look really good.
C.M.: But why?
Alan: Because you're older.
Matt: Because when you were younger like no one really compared pictures and now people start to compare pictures.
C.M.: Do they?
Matt: I don't know. Well, it seems like they do.
Ellyn: Yeah.
C.M.: It seems like they do?
Ellyn: And, like, people look at your picture and you want it to look good cuz you don't want them to say, eww, that looks bad, you're not a good drawer.
C.M.: What do you think, Samantha?
Samantha: Well, when you were younger I don't think you were concerned about people saying your's wasn't good or whatever because everyone, you didn't, you put time into it but you didn't really pay attention as much or focus as much as you do now and you don't care as much what other people think cuz theirs is just as bad.

That the children themselves brought up the topic of comparing drawings is noteworthy. In a later meeting, Matt brought up comparing drawings again. In this session I met with Ellyn, Alan, and Matt. The two boys were laughing and acting silly because, they said, they hadn't had recess yet. I brought up a statement Matt made from a previous discussion:

C.M.: Okay, Matt, silly Matt, here you are saying, here's my question: "Matt, do you think you approach drawing when you were in first grade the same way you approach it now?" You said, "No, because when we were younger all's we do is concentrate on making the lines. Now we just try to make the lines neater than just, like, all squiggly." What do you mean by squiggly?
Matt: Like, when we were in first grade or kindergarten we'd just, like, make the circle as best as we could and we wouldn't erase it. But now we try to erase it to make it look better cuz when we were young we didn't really compare drawings.
C.M.: Why not, do you suppose? Why didn't you compare them when you were young? You mean, compare to whom, to what?
Matt: To, like, other people's. Other people would just, would just say they're done and then, and then go back and work. *(when he was younger)*
C.M.: And now when you do it you compare it to what others do?

Matt: Well, we don't really, like, go up to someone and ask them. We just look at them and look and see what they're drawing.
C.M.: Okay, so you just, when you compare you just look at somebody's work and then at your work and then what?
Matt: Try to make it like theirs.
C.M.: You try to make your work look like someone else's?
Matt: Like, if I'm drawing something else or, like, see how they drew, like, if someone drew a lion and I was drawing a baby tiger, I would, like, try to get the same shape cuz it's kind of the same.

Matt brought up comparing drawings again although my question simply asked what he meant by the word "squiggly." He explained how a child would compare his work to another child's work. He wouldn't just completely copy another student's work but, rather, he would use a peer's idea or graphic symbol to help him with his drawing. I found this somewhat surprising that Matt would admit to copying a classmate's idea when copying another's work is often discouraged in schools. But Matt seemed to think nothing of it, as if it was an accepted part of drawing. On another occasion when I asked Matt how he got ideas for drawing he said, "From memory, like, from other drawings." They offered this information readily and were not concerned that copying from others was ordinarily not welcomed in schools.

That the children shared techniques of graphic imagery with their peers was evident in another conversation in which Samantha told us about a drawing of hers that depicted a landscape with a sky at the top of the paper, grass at the bottom, and various objects in between. This is a common method of drawing among children. By the age of 10 or 12, however, children usually begin to draw the sky touching the ground as they aim for a more realistic portrayal of the phenomenal world. Samantha told us that her friend, Sue, noticed that Samantha had drawn the sky at the top and so she pointed it out to her. Sue showed Samantha that her sky should have come down behind the objects and to the ground. She used peer teaching to show Samantha about her drawing. Samantha related the following peer interaction:

Samantha: Or else if someone points it out that the sky actually, like Sue said as I was drawing it, and the sky's only going half way, so Sue goes, "Why is the sky only going that far?" I said, "I don't know," and so.
C.M.: She said that? Oh, and then you fixed it?
Samantha: Yeah. Cuz it looked funny.
C.M.: Hmm. So, would you, would you know that if you didn't go to school?
Alan: I don't know. Maybe after a while you would, cuz
Samantha: Cuz you'd notice it'd look funny.
Alan: Or maybe you saw other people drawing, you would think that theirs looked really good and that you wanted your drawings to look like that so you would try to just, like, copy them.

Sue "taught" Samantha how to create a horizon line by connecting the sky with the ground. In the same conversation Alan also mentioned copying from other students. The

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children seemed to accept the fact that they used their classmates as resources for drawing.

The discouragement of copying often occurs in the regular classroom environment in which student work relates to "right" and "wrong" answers. In the art classroom, finding answers is not about right and wrong. Teachers often use graphic images from such sources as reproductions of fine art, photographs, or magazines, from which children "copy" or "borrow." At the same time, art teachers often urge students to develop their own individual style and to "express" themselves, which often discourages copying from others. Despite the practice of "borrowing" graphic images, children still hide their papers in the art classroom or complain that others are "copying" from them. In our conversations, however, the children talked about copying as if it were a natural, accepted method of learning.

Researchers hold varying views as to the impact of the peer group on children's drawing development. For over 100 years, psychologists, artists, and art educators have described artistic development as a naturally unfolding process that occurs in every child across all cultures. Lowenfeld (1949), Schaeffer-Simmern (1950), Freeman (1980), Golomb (1992), and others minimize the influence of the peer group and support the notion of a universal style of child art. They view graphic development as a "universally ordered sequence and an intrinsically meaningful mental activity" (Golomb, 1992, p. 337). Golomb shows that the drawings of human figures indicate that children experiment with diverse graphic solutions, a diversity that consists of variations on an underlying theme. Development evolves across cultures with structurally simple forms and figures always preceding more complex ones. The rules for representing the world are the same everywhere, Golomb argues, even though specific graphic models may become a preferred pattern (p. 337).

Wilson and Wilson (1980, 1984) on the other hand, suggest that graphic models are learned as younger children imitate older ones, stressing a culture-dependent development in artistic ability. The Wilsons found the graphic symbols of the Egyptian village children they studied to be relatively few in number, relatively stable, and passed from one child to another. They argue that children learn to draw through the transmission of graphic symbols from one culture to the next in much the same way that children transmit games and rhymes from one generation to another, as the Opies (1969) observed.

Most of the research on children's graphic symbols is from examinations of numerous children's drawings rather than from eliciting talk from the child artists. The Wilsons (1977), however, in one study, interviewed high school and college students on an individual basis about drawings they had produced as young children. They found that the images the students produced could be traced back to a previously existing graphic source, either from the drawings of peers or family members, or from images from the popular media. The fact that the children in my study indicated that they copied from their peers seems to agree with the Wilsons' theory that graphic development is dependent on the handing down of images from one "generation" of children to the next.

The children's assertion that they "copy" and learn from their classmates also agrees with Vygotskian theory that children learn from their more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The children were straightforward in their comments about copying from peers despite the fact that in the art classroom, they often shield their drawings from others and complain of other children "copying their work." But the children in my study treated copying as if it were an accepted part of learning.

Implications

The significance of this study is that children live in a social world of their own that is different from an adult's world. The children were quite willing to reveal their world and to learn about the adult world, although they wanted to keep the boundaries between the two worlds in view. The children's perspectives on a variety of issues were framed by their membership in their world. It is important that adults realize that children's perspectives may be different from adults' perspectives and that in teaching children we are presenting them with an alternative view rather than a correct view.

Emphasis is placed here on the differences between children's perspectives and adults' perspectives. Because there is almost constant interaction between children and adults during the school day, conflicting perspectives may occur frequently. Adults and children will benefit from the reminder that children may have a distinct social world and that world has rules and behaviors that may be separate from those in the adult world. Teachers lack experience in making sense of what student voices might be saying (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). More room needs to be made for student voices in the ordinary conduct of classroom life.

Children need to know they have some power in an adult-controlled environment such as school. Choice gives them some of this power. If choices are absent, children may feel as if they are being forced to learn or to perform, and forcing often leads to resistance. Teachers need to talk to students about how they can participate in various decision making processes in the classroom.

Just as words stand for an idea, so can a graphic image stand for an idea or for an object. Graphic imagery does not need to realistically represent the phenomenal world. If children are more conscious of peer approval of their work, perhaps art lessons that "capture reality" should be shelved and replaced with lessons that have more of a focus on abstract or non-representational imagery. This change of focus may lesson the pressure on children and may free them from embarrassment if their drawings don't meet their and others' expectations. Teachers can also provide examples of art making that show symbolic representations of reality rather than realistic ones. Classroom activities can help children realize that there are many ways to use drawing for symbolic rather than for realistic representations.

Children learn from their peers. School learning environments do not typically emphasize shared learning. They focus instead on the importance of individual competencies, in the art classroom as well as in the regular classroom. In some disciplines

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group work is more common. In art education this practice is often discouraged so that children can "express themselves" or use their own unique imagination. However, children are eager to work together and like "to partner," as one young student of mine referred to working with a friend. Group mural work is an ideal way for children to work together, to learn from each other, and to spend time within their peer group. Children will use the same stored graphic imagery repeatedly unless they learn new imagery from others, from schooling, or from other sources in their environment. Teachers can offer a variety of visual images so children can build up a repertoire from which to draw and to manipulate.

This study also has methodological implications for working with children. Because of the rapport established in my four years of teaching them and then extended in my conversations with the children, I was able to gain their trust. They said things they might not ordinarily say to an adult or to an outsider. Since I had known the children long before the study, I could begin to focus on their language and interactions without first having to take time to sort out their distinct personalities and ways of speaking. Many of their understandings and perspectives were assumed and unspoken but, since I had a history of working with the children, I was able to discern these otherwise hidden agendas. For an outsider without this background, conversations with the children may have necessitated more time to generate data.

Working with children in a small group of peers allowed the children to feel comfortable. Having a body of their own artwork to look at helped ease into a conversation with them and with each other. Their conversations with each other gave additional evidence of their perspectives on their world and on their art and were more productive than a one-on-one conversation between researcher and student might have been.

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